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Prepare to meet your Maker

We take a look at Sony's answer to amateur game development, the black PlayStation... Net Yaroze



76



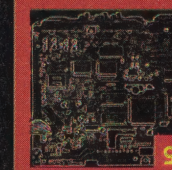
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PRINTED BY: Mike Colours
SEPARATIONS BY: Prestige Colour
DISTRIBUTION BY: NBN PH: 9353 9911
ALL COPYRIGHTS RESERVED BY
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ISSN 1320 7450
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Prepare to meet your maker

FOR SO MANY YEARS, CONSOLES AND PCS HAVE BEEN WORLDS APART. SURE,
WHEN IT COMES TO GAMES, THEY BOTH DO PRETTY MUCH THE SAME THING,
BUT THE IDEA OF USING THE TWO TOGETHER IS A PRETTY OUTLANDISH ONE
FOR MOST. SONY HAVE GONE ABOUT TRYING TO BRIDGE THIS GAP BY OFFER-
ING THE PUBLIC THE MEANS TO MAKE PLAYSTATION GAMES

WITH THE NET YAROZE...

THE BLACK PLAYSTATION.



prepare to meet your maker

Yes, it's true, the creator is black.

Many of you have been asking us for information on the black PlayStation, which, by the way, is called the Net Yaroze. For those keen on translations, 'Yaroze' translates to "Let's create", which makes it sound like some sort of Edutainment tool, but rest assured, the Net Yaroze is about making serious games. The Yaroze was launched in Japan back in May 1996, and has already had thousands of buyers, some of whom have gone on to produce fully playable 3D games.

Before all of you get too excited, there's a few things you need to be able to use the Net Yaroze. For starters you'll need a PC with the following specs:

- 486DX2 66 MHz CPU
- A free serial port
- 4MB of RAM
- A 14.4bps (28.8bps) modem
- An Internet Access account

should serious look into getting a TV that handles both formats. Those with a scart TV/monitor will be pleased to know an AV to scart adaptor comes free with the Yaroze.

For those who really want to know the nitty gritty details, here's what else is included:

- A special security access card that you must leave in memory slot 1.
- A comms cable (RS232C Serial), which carries the data transfer from the Net Yaroze PlayStation to your PC. The baud rate can vary from 9600 bps, through to 115200bps
- Some sample data, including textures, 3D models and sound samples... to ensure you can start making something straight away.
- A bit of sample code for you to work from.
- Sound utilities that allow you to convert from AIFF and Midi SMF
- 2D & 3D graphics file converters (DXF, BMP, PICT, RSD, RGB)
- C, sound, maths, 2D & 3D libraries
- GNU C based development environment including R3000 C compiler
- Two black PlayStation controllers, that look and feel unbelievably cool (Dan wants one bad).

The whole thing works by having you provide the code on your PC, which communicates with the Yaroze. Once the Yaroze has the game in memory, you can play the game. You also need

WWW site set up for Net Yaroze members, so they can show others what they've done. Rather than allowing others to rip off your source code and lay claim to your labour, this actually is the most effective way of saying "I did this, it's mine". The original author retains legal ownership of any source code. Those still paranoid can upload games that are just executable, so people can't examine the source code.

Those keen on completing a game and getting it published should remember that they'll really need to go through one of the registered PlayStation publishers, especially since you won't be able to burn CDs that a standard PlayStation will be able to read (not legally anyway).

If you've been looking for a way to break into the video games industry, this could well be the ticket, since the existing developers and publishers will be checking out the Net Yaroze sites, trawling for talent. Will this get you a job? That all depends on how good you are, and how much you present yourself, which gives you that extra incentive to upload your efforts onto the Yaroze members sites.

That's the easy part, since only the most dated PCs don't come up to scratch there. The tricky bit is that you'll need to be reasonably proficient in programming in C. The Yaroze is not some simplistic game production tool, like the old "Shoot Em Up Construction Kit". The other tricky bit is that you'll need approximately \$1100, which kind of ruins your chances of having someone just pop it in your stocking at Christmas. The price may seem high, but the development software that comes with the Yaroze is worth a hell of a lot more than that.

What do you get for your hard earned cash? For starters you get the Net Yaroze Member's PlayStation, which will play any PlayStation CD from anywhere in the world. Of course the Yaroze's ability to read both NTSC and PAL discs doesn't mean you can get around not having an NTSC TV or monitor, so if you want to be able to play Japanese games, you

to connect to the Internet via your PC to get the most of the Yaroze.

Club Yaroze

Whilst a talented individual with lots of time on their hands could go about making games in their bedroom with no contact with the outside world, that is not what the Yaroze is all about. Once you buy a Net Yaroze, you're considered a member of the Net Yaroze club, which is essentially an online game developers community. It is hoped people will get together and share ideas, etc. and pool their resources to produce something as a team. For example,

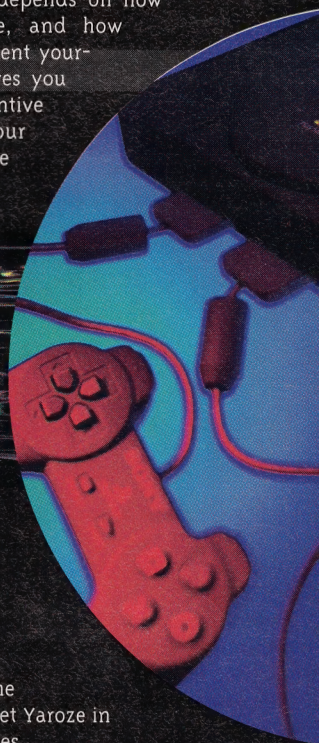
a couple of graphic artists, a sound engineer and a hotshot coder might share some of their work, get talking, and come up with something far more impressive than any of them could have done alone.

Yaroze owners can upload their stuff to a special

We talked to Paul Holman from Sony Computer Entertainment Europe about the release of the Net Yaroze in the PAL territories.

Hyper: Firstly, the question of who the Net Yaroze is valid for needs to be answered, since almost everyone out there would love to "Give it a shot", but realistically, can someone with no experience in C programming, buy the Yaroze, and then learn the basics from the package provided?

PH: Ah, this question is a little like asking "How easy would it be for me to learn French?". In this case, a familiarity with computers is essential, but personally I think "C" is probably as easy to pick up as Basic was when I started back in the '80s.



I also believe that Net Yaroze a good platform to learn to program, although I would recommend some additional "Teach Yourself C" books.

Hyper: With the connection to the Internet via the PC, is this opening an avenue for testing out the idea of PlayStation online?

PH: Interesting question. At this stage, all I would say is that there are a number of different opportunities provided by the Net Yaroze.

Hyper: Does the Yaroze allow the owners to examine the source code of conventional PlayStation software? If so, does this potentially allow people to make clones of existing games?

PH: No it doesn't. In fact Yaroze Members don't even have to offer up their own source code, and can distribute an "executable" version to other Members via our site.

Hyper: What sort of numbers are you looking to sell this year throughout Europe and Australia?

PH: Personally, I would be more interested in

ISA boards that emulate PlayStation and its CD mechanism installed in a fast PC and combined with specialised CD burners.

The advantage of the Yaroze system is that its easier to use, but has a common set of library functions - its thus very easy to move a game developed on a Yaroze onto the "professional" environment.

Hyper: The World Wide Web based Yaroze community sounds like a great idea. Can people that haven't got a Yaroze check out what Yaroze owners have been doing in any way? Like AVI files, newsgroups, etc? And if so, have you had cases of graphic artists helping out programmers working on their games?

PH: Absolutely - in fact Yaroze Members can show off their demos and games in an "executable" form. At the moment, everyone who joins is provided with their own Web area on our site, allowing them to show off their work - in addition we provide specialised newsgroups. As people get

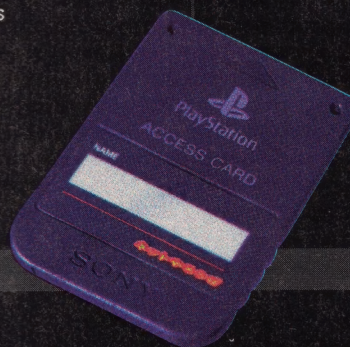
Hyper: Are there any other plans or applications for the Yaroze other than the development of games?

PH: Yes, I think we're simply laying foundations that will allow us to build a whole series of projects. One simple idea in Japan was to have an area where Memory card saves could be exchanged - but as soon as "Carnage Heart" was published (which allows players to construct personalised robots which are saved on Memory card) a competition was launched to find the "top robot" using these saves.

The other important aspect is the openness of Net Yaroze - people can develop anything they like and take the PlayStation in new directions. I think the next year will be an interesting one for us all.

Anyone interested in the Net Yaroze should contact Paul Holman either by email

ps_yaroze@interactive.sony.com
or by phone: +44 171 4471616. Web:
<http://www.scee.sony.co.uk/>



quality rather than quantity, but my hope is that we gain a few thousand enthusiasts actively working together on projects. Although the product only started shipping in March, its been great to see the first members to join in Europe and Australia are already working on demos, sharing ideas and information.

Hyper: If this is the amateur method of producing games for the PlayStation, then could you describe the main differences in approach that the professional publishers use? Have they been using something similar to the Yaroze, or have they had to code the lot on PC, burn a CD, and port it over?

PH: The "professional" system is rather more complex - and indeed expensive than the Yaroze approach. Their system is based around PCI or

together, we will also provide these groups with their own private areas to work. We're also working with Yaroze groups in America and Japan, to ensure that you can have direct access to the entire "world of Net Yaroze".

In Japan (where the project has been running since May '96), whole teams of people have met up via the Yaroze site.

Hyper: The Yaroze can play both NTSC and PAL PlayStation CDs. How is this done?

PH: Simply because the PlayStation is "multi-format" and "multi-territory". Whilst the machine won't play pirate (gold) discs, it will play PlayStation discs published anywhere in the world - although you may need to obtain a Multi format TV.

